

If evolutionists inspired Scripture

Seven Glorious Days: A Scientist Retells the Genesis Creation Story

Karl W. Giberson

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Lita Cosner

What if we could rewrite Scripture, taking out the things that we think are outdated, disproved, contradictory, or offensive? Karl Giberson lets us see a glimpse of his attempt to rewrite and reinterpret Genesis 1 in his book *Seven Glorious Days*.¹

Giberson is well known as a theistic evolutionist, but he claims this was not always the case. He used to be a young-earth creationist, based on a literal reading of the first chapters of Genesis. However, he says,

“While studying science at Eastern Nazarene College near Boston I became convinced that the scientific explanations for our origins were true. The biblical account, read literally, simply could not be reconciled with the facts that science was discovering” (p. 1).

This did not cause him to lose his faith entirely, but launched a quest to attempt to understand Genesis in light of evolution and billions of years.

An evolutionary retelling of Genesis

The very beginning of Giberson’s book is a reinterpreted ‘Genesis 1’, which attempts to fit the evolutionary story of origins into seven ‘epochs’. The writing is stilted; Giberson was trying to find a balance between retaining features of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and trying to convey an evolutionary understanding of the universe in simplified language. Even

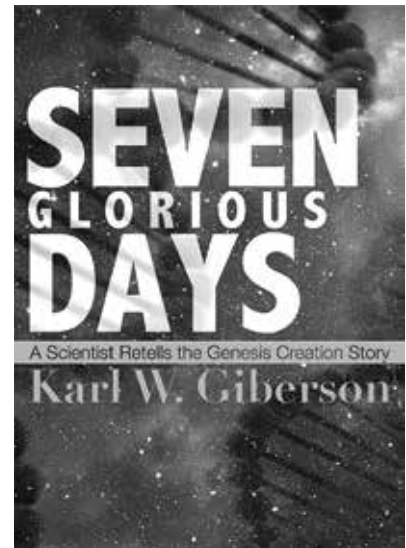
a gifted writer might find such a task daunting, but he falls decidedly short of what one imagines his aspirations were for the passage. At least he is honest from the outset, though—he is out to reinterpret Genesis, so much so that by the time he is finished, there is not much of the original left. God is there, and He’s doing something that results in the universe, but that is as far as the similarities go.

The rest of the book is an expansion of these initial few pages. Giberson, more than anything else, is attempting to tell a narrative of theistic evolution, weaving evolutionary science and a (small) bit of theology together to try to come up with as compelling a story as the one inspired in Scripture.

One advantage to narrative is that of the demands on giving evidence, discussing the mechanisms for the things that are said to have happened, and dealing with the problems of the theories. So when he claims, for example, that “our solar system, including the sun, originated about five billion years ago from a large cloud of atoms and molecules that were gathered into huge balls by gravity” (p.22), he can do so free from any expectation that he explain how bits of dust and chunks of rock exerted enough force on each other to stick together until they became planet-size. In reality, the particles are more likely to bounce off each other.^{2,3} And he can feel free to personify impersonal, random processes, as when he says, “Nature is constantly upgrading species with the latest technology, whether it is longer legs or bigger brains” (p. 114). Because his audience is not primarily made up of scientists, few people are likely to challenge him in any case.

The Logos of creation

Logos is the Greek for ‘Word’, and it is most famously the term John used in



Genesis 1 when He proclaimed in John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This is the first instance in the New Testament of a theme that is often repeated—Jesus is the agent of creation (John 1:3), who continues to uphold it continually (Colossians 1:15–17).

The term “the Logos of Creation” is introduced in Giberson’s creation narrative, and recurs throughout the book, but this ‘Logos’ is nothing like the Logos of the Bible. He defines this Logos as “the pattern of God’s purpose from which everything would emerge and towards which everything would evolve” (p. x). He uses the word ‘it’ to describe the Logos (p. xiii), which is theologically ignorant at best, and blasphemous at worst.

Giberson's creator

The creator in Giberson’s *Seven Glorious Days* does not work miracles, or if he does, he does not do so in a way that would be detectable as such. This God is behind the scenes, watching, setting the wheels in motion, but never interfering with the process of evolution, either cosmic or biological. In fact, much of the book could have been written by an atheist with very few changes.

This is in contrast to the Creator in Scripture. The Bible is a book of God supernaturally creating, and then

stepping down into His creation, active in history, raising up or destroying nations, all to bring about the circumstances in which the Messiah would be born. If Giberson's creator does any of this, he does not discuss it in this book.

Death and the 'problem of evil'

The problem of death has troubled philosophers and is a major subject in theodicy. "But the extinction of species need not trouble us any more than the finite lives of people A species can be part of the grand narrative of life without having to live forever" (p. 113). He tries to answer the 'nature, red in tooth and claw' argument by retorting that nature rewards cooperation and altruism, and that for most of history. And in any case, he says, "During the first few billion years, life was dominated by rather boring, single-celled life forms incapable of anything so interesting as ripping up their fellow organisms" (p. 117).

But his argument has at least a couple of errors worth pointing out. He only looks at death caused by organisms killing each other, as if cancer, sickness, and old age were any better. And he assumes that since organisms haven't been killing each other for all that long on the evolutionary scale, and since cooperation is rewarded by nature (which at times seems more personal than God in Giberson's writing), the atrocity is lessened somewhat. But the Bible depicts the fact that people die *at all* as an atrocity (e.g. "the last enemy" (1 Corinthians 15:26; "the wages of sin" (Romans 6:23)), not part of the design God set up for the universe. A key part of the restoration of the new heavens and earth in Revelation *and* Isaiah is that there is no death or suffering, of humans or animals.

The authority of Scripture?

What is most unsettling about Giberson's writing for a Christian reviewer is that Giberson, who is also a professing Christian, can weave a wonderful

branching tale about the history of the cosmos and the human race without even once referring to Scripture, except to rewrite it or rephrase it to suit his evolutionary story. There's no Adam; there's no original sin. He does say that "The Creator of the universe, as revealed in Jesus, is a God of love" (p. 178), but there's no mention of salvation, nor indeed anything that we need to be saved from. None of the critical threads of the Bible's history are covered—Jesus simply came to teach us to love. Certainly, love is *one* thing that Jesus came to teach, but it's hardly the only thing, and that love is certainly not disconnected from His teaching about ethics, the nature of God, and the need for us all to be saved.

Giberson draws on the evolutionary narrative to weave his story, but it's unclear how his professed Christianity makes his story of human history any different from, say, Dawkins' view. What does Scripture tell us about our history that science can't? And at what point does he say, "Scripture teaches this, uncompromisingly, even if a certain interpretation of science seems to tell us otherwise?" Where he draws the line, if at all, is really very unclear.

Giberson's gospel

The Bible's narrative starts with a supernatural, 'very good' creation, marred by the Fall. Central to the Gospel is the fact that human beings are born with a severed, hostile relationship to God, which must be corrected by God, because we're helpless to change ourselves. But Giberson has removed the 'very good' creation revealed in Genesis 1:31, the first man, and the Fall, which brought death to mankind and the rest of creation. So it should not be surprising that his gospel is similarly distorted. Ironically, precisely where his book is the most recognizably theist is where it falls critically short of being truly Christian:

"We believe that God's incarnation in a humble member of our species was motivated by his love for the

world. The Creator of the universe, as revealed in Jesus, is a God of love—not political power or economic power as many would have preferred and some still do. Jesus, the most provocative and influential teacher of all time, had a singular message for his followers—to love" (p. 178).

Of course, Jesus revealed a God of love, and taught His followers to love. But His *primary* message was one of salvation and the coming Kingdom of God.

A successful, but deeply flawed, narrative

Giberson weaves a narrative about a god who created through evolution, and he does so in an attractive, readable style. That god, however, falls far short of the God revealed in the Bible. Christians have preached Jesus and died for His name for 2,000 years; one wonders why anyone would bother doing something like that for Giberson's god, who is portrayed as a God of love. But how can we see God's love until Jesus comes on the scene (which is after the vast majority of history in evolutionary terms⁴)?

Giberson ultimately does the creation movement a favour in his book—he shows just how much of the Gospel and essential Christian theology one must give up to be an informed, consistent theistic evolutionist. Some sort of god *is* left over, but he is hardly worthy of our worship.

References

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